

Washington, D.C. - Deeply concerned about the still-unknown effects that rising levels of pharmaceuticals and household chemicals in our drinking water have on people, Congresswoman Bean amended a nation water policy today to require a comprehensive analysis by government scientists of this disturbing trend.

“We know that millions of Americans are drinking tap water that contains measurable quantities of prescription drugs and other complex chemical compounds, but we have no long-term plan to address the problem,” Bean said. “Understanding what levels of these drugs pose a threat to human health is the necessary first step.”

A 2008 report by the Chicago Tribune said that an independent test of drinking water at sites across the region found trace amounts of “dozens of prescription and over-the-counter drugs as well as chemicals from personal-care products, food packaging, clothing and household goods.” Recently, researchers from Baylor University reported finding trace amounts of pharmaceuticals in fish caught in different cities across the nation, including Chicago. Those drugs included anti-depressants, anti-seizure medications, blood pressure medications, and fragrances from soap, which are not filtered by current wastewater treatment facilities.

However, while reports confirm the presence of drugs and unregulated chemicals in our drinking water, an effective treatment strategy is not possible until the effects of different compounds on human health is understood. Bean’s amendment requires such a study as part of H.R. 1145, the National Water Research and Development Initiative Act. This bill coordinates national research and development efforts on water and provides for development of a national water strategy.

Bean’s amendment, cosponsored with Reps. Betty McCollum (MN-04), Carolyn McCarthy (NY-04) and Gerald Connolly (VA-11), was incorporated into the manager’s amendment offered by House Science and Technology Chairman Bart Gordon, which passed. The full bill, including Bean’s language, passed the House today 413 to 10.

“Without a thorough understanding of challenges posed by the presence of pharmaceuticals in our drinking water, we cannot begin to address this issue,” Bean said. “It is critical that regulators have all information necessary to determine if and how to direct water utilities to combat contaminated water.”